



PRESS RELEASE

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DETAINEES FROM ANOTHER PANAMA EXPRESS SEIZURE ARRIVE IN TAMPA

U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez announced today the unsealing of an Indictment upon the arrival in Tampa of nine individuals to face federal cocaine smuggling charges. The individuals were arrested on May 25, 2002 in international waters in the Eastern Pacific ocean aboard the Colombian fishing vessel, "Punta Del Este." The defendants are charged with conspiring to possess with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine while aboard the F/V Punta Del Este, as well as possession with intent to distribute the cocaine while aboard the vessel. The charges carry a potential sentence, if convicted, ranging from mandatory ten years to life imprisonment.

The following individuals are scheduled to make their initial appearances in Tampa federal court today at 3:00 p.m. : Angel Neri Estrada-Tello, Arcesio Caicedo-Montano, Julio Cesar Diago, Marco Antonio Araujo-Estrada, Yimmy Araujo-Estrada, Sigifredo Oliveros-Estupinan, Edgar Fernando Rodriguez-Ramos, Ruben Orlando Escobar and Wilfredo Florez-Montano.

The United States Coast Guard boarded the Colombian longline fishing vessel in international waters several hundred miles south of Mexico on May 23, 2002. Upon boarding and examination of the vessel, more than six tons of cocaine were discovered in a compartment hidden inside a fuel tank. The detainees were transported to Tampa, Florida and will be prosecuted in accordance with United States' law.

The seizure marks another multi-ton interdiction of drugs on the high seas related to Operation Panama Express, which now totals more than 130 tons of cocaine. United States Attorney Paul I. Perez praised the efforts of the United States Coast Guard: "While many of us were enjoying the Memorial Day weekend at home, our United States Coast Guard was busy making another major cocaine seizure at sea. The Coast Guard is a critical partner in our ongoing investigation, "Panama Express." Participating in the joint investigation are The United States Coast Guard (USCG), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Customs Service (USCS) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Joseph K. Ruddy and Anthony Porcelli of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force for the Middle District of Florida.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.
